

Opening Statement of the Honorable Fred Upton
Subcommittee on Health
Hearing on “Examining Microbeads in Cosmetic Products”
May 1, 2015

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Microbeads – they’re tiny plastic, but big time pollution, especially for our lakes, rivers, and streams.

What’s a microbead? You may not know it, or want to admit you exfoliate, but millions of Americans use them on a daily basis. Microbeads are those tiny little scrubbers in your soap, cleansers, and even toothpaste. On their own, they are nearly invisible, smaller than a pinhead – as you can see here compared with the size of a penny.

But once they’ve been flushed down the drain is when the problems begin. Because they are so small, they escape water filtration systems and end up in our bodies of water, including the Great Lakes. They are known to absorb pollutants, and are often mistaken as food by fish and wildlife. Simply put, microbeads are causing mega-problems.

This is why I partnered with our full committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone to author H.R. 1321, the Microbeads-Free Waters Act of 2015. There are also currently 26 states that have engaged on legislation to address this important issue.

I am excited to partner with the Ranking Member on an issue that is so important to my district in Southwest Michigan, the entire Great Lakes Region, and to me and my family personally. As someone who grew up on Lake Michigan and represents a large chunk of Michigan coastline, I understand firsthand how important it is to maintain the beauty and integrity of our Great Lakes. The Great Lakes have survived many a foe – severe pollution, oil spills, discharge from refineries, zebra mussels, and attempts to steal our water, just to name a few. Our fight against the Asian carp also continues. I will not stand for any activity that puts our beloved Great Lakes in jeopardy. I look forward to working with my colleagues in a bipartisan manner to get this harmful pollutant out of our waterways. We need this bill to fight the army of microbeads that is growing by the day in our waters.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here, especially my Michigan and Great Lakes friends, Dan Wyant of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and Molly Flanagan from the Alliance for the Great Lakes. And thank you for your efforts protecting our pristine lakes.

As the Holland Sentinel editorialized in March, “There’s no reason keeping our faces feeling clean should require us to trash our lakes.”

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